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ABSTRACT

The old campus school was the progenitor of the contemporary teacher center. It died due to excessive costs, its "artificial setting," and problems with control. The question is, Is the teacher center immune to the problems that beset its progenitor? A general consideration of teacher centers as a change vehicle leads one to speculate that because of the increase in the number of people involved, teacher centers may inhibit some of the desired changes. Experience with the teacher center at Syracuse University has brought a number of issues to light: (a) the nature of the initial partnership between the two cooperating institutions; (b) the models used in handling ongoing teacher center negotiations; (c) the use of competency-based teacher education; (d) the creation of a new position, field coordinator, and the necessary training for such an individual; (e) the changing role of professors; (f) the involvement of classroom and university teachers; (g) the idea of the community as an equal partner; (h) the concept of in-service programs for school personnel; and (i) the need for a systematic research component. (JA)

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TEACHING CENTERS: UTOPIA, EUTOPIA, OR KAKOTOPIA?*

by

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"Wherefore not Utopie, but rather rightly
My name is Eutopie."

To the true believer, the advocacy of the Teaching Center concept is seldom, if ever, pejorative. His is the speculative vision of the ideal. He makes little pretense of developing a theoretical base which, when relating the facts, may tend to tarnish the illusion. Whether Teaching Centers are a utopia or an eutopia or a kakotopia is still an open question--a question yet to be resolved.

It may be well to note that the progenitor of the contemporary Teaching Center was the old campus school. In what now seems as the "Golden Age," we attempted to use the campus school concept as a way to bring under some manageable control the preparation of teachers, the teaching done by teachers, the learning experiences (or curriculum) encountered by pupils, and the actual learning achieved by students.

The campus school was born, nourished, existed, and died. There was little note in the journals of its passing. Why didn't the campus school thrive? With no pretense at rigid sampling, I posed this question to some of my colleagues who are currently in full pursuit of the Teaching Center concept. Several reasons were offered. I share them with you.

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1) The cost of campus schools became increasingly prohibitive; 2) The campus school was an "artificial" setting and was disjointed from the real school situation; 3) It was tightly controlled by the teacher educators; 4) The attending pupil population was not representative; 5) No solid research on teaching and learning was generated; and 6) It became administratively manageable--the teachers held university rank, the parent pressures were unrealistic and frustrating, supervision was multipurposed and seldom systematically approached, and campus politics made the conventional boards of education look like a Sunday School picnic. . . .

I do not know how valid the above responses are. But, if there is *any* truth in the six explanations, one is forced to ask:

Are the costs of staffing and running a teaching center less prohibitive than those encountered in the old campus school?

Are we to assume that teacher educators no longer wish to control? Paraphrasing Lionel Trilling (when discussing major themes in modern literature) are we to assume that teacher educators are willing to lose themselves "up to the point of self-destruction, of surrendering . . . to experience without regard to self-interest . . . ?"

Are we to accept that campus schools could not have monitored the pupils attending in order to ensure a more representative student body?

What kinds of specific research efforts are *now* intentionally linked with teaching centers? Have we simply placed this old concern into a new setting with (again) no systematic support? (I have yet to see a teaching center agreement specifically identifying the research component in the partnership!)

What leads us to believe that a teaching center is more administratively manageable than was the traditional campus school? Do we have any reason to assume that the coordination and management of a teaching center will be less difficult?

The question I am raising is simply: What suggests that teaching centers are (or will be) any more viable and feasible than were the old campus schools? I am *not* opposed to the teaching center concept. But, I am concerned that we approach the teaching center opportunity in a manner reflecting how Francis Bacon, in his *New Atlantis* approached his vision. Bacon anticipated not only the benefits but took pains to outline the conditions involved in its achievement--in his case, the application of science as a means "to the effecting of all things possible."

With Aesop, I feel a bit uneasy lest we lose the substance by grasping at shadows.

I have been asked to address the "changes" that have come about as a result of Syracuse University's involvement with teaching centers. I believe that it will be more productive to address the issues involved to a greater extent than the specific changes emanating from the issues. The issues appear to be generalizable to the teaching center concept while our specific "moves" to encounter the issues may be situation specific and thus reflect our own set of circumstances.

It can be argued that a basic element of change is the awareness of the issues and a realization that if an institution goes the teaching center route, the issues cannot be ignored. The issues themselves become change leverage if an institution chooses to use them as such.

Teaching Centers have been viewed as potential change vehicles. The use of the potential depends upon the nature and type of changes desired. The teaching center may, in fact, *inhibit* some of the desired changes. Centers are cumbersome in that more people are involved, shared decision-making calls for all sorts of power realignments, substantial energy goes into administrative timing and administrative problems, and change efforts involve the interfacing of two distinct social organizations--each involved in internal change and each aware that the degree of success depends upon changes being made external to itself. "Control" in many respects becomes dissipated. This is not to say that the dissipation isn't worth the effort--it merely suggests that the Teaching Center Involvement forces one to address the types of changes wanted, the resources needed, and the crucial role time and timing plays in bringing about change. For example, if a school of education is involved in reconceptualizing the existing program in terms of competencies, it may be dysfunctional, as Dave Hunt suggested recently, to try to repair the bicycle in the middle of a ride.

What I am suggesting is that it is a rather simplistic notion to hold that Teaching Centers offer instant cures or a sudden millenium.

Syracuse has one formalized teaching center in operation at the present time. By formalized, I mean a linkage between the School of Education and a public school district which has been forged on the basis of a formally agreed upon statement of rules and procedures; a linkage governed by a Teaching Center Board on which university and school personnel sit; a linkage evidenced by a Teaching Center

Coordinator who is jointly hired by both the school system and the university; a linkage involving both preservice and inservice components.

Agreements with three other school systems are underway and it is anticipated that three more teaching centers will be in operation next year. The Teacher Corps affiliation with the Syracuse City School District is not a formal teaching center but does include many if not all of the components in the formal center and may go beyond, in a sense, by having its governing board include the community being served.

All of the Syracuse field centers have their unique problems: Precedent, school needs, personnel, political sophistication, funding, etc., appear to reflect the same issues but in different lights and intensity.

Following are a number of issues which we have encountered. Addressing each issue (and countless numbers of related sub-issues) is basic if any significant change is to take place. The issues are not intended to be "shadows" but rather substantive concerns.

1. *The Nature of the Initial Agreement*: There seems to be a tendency to view the initial agreement between the two cooperating partner institutions as being directed towards meeting school concerns and needs. The initial agreement is a negotiated negotiating framework and *both* partners are expected to have specific benefits from the intended arrangements. The university should identify its own interests, know what is negotiable and what is not negotiable. For example, if the agreement assumes that a considerable portion of the preserviee training is to take place on site, discussing cooperating teacher

vouchers without being specific reference to the classroom teacher's role in the training is to court eventual conflict. If the teachers' role is a crucial supervisory and/or evaluative role, which partner (perhaps both) establishes the criteria for selecting cooperating teachers? How are they evaluated? What kind of training will they receive . . . and who will provide the training and under what circumstances? Or, what specifically should be the role of the university if a silent or behind-the-scenes agent when a Teacher's Organization carries on its *own* (nonpartner) negotiations with the board of education--negotiations which influence the policy and procedures of the Teaching Center?

The issue seems to be one of whether or not the university can afford to place initial demands upon the partnership or whether the initial demands come from the school alone. If the latter, the concept of partnership is sorely tested.

2. *The "Models" used in handling on-going Teaching Center negotiations.* Having a Teaching Center Task Force at the University comprised of faculty, administration, and field faculty may assist in framing policy issues but this in no way determines how the issues are to be negotiated with the other partner. And, having a joint Teaching Center Board for each field center is no insurance against having misunderstanding about the political nature of the center. Teaching Centers are political entities and require the various constituents of *both* parties to have some political sophistication. Both parties have distinct vested interests in the center--some directly educational and some rather remotely connected. A political model for functioning which calls upon compromise, power, timing, and influence may run counter to the education model based on evidence, expertise, and the dominance of some nonnegotiable educational concerns.

The danger in a Teaching Center appears to be that the involved leaders may use a political model in handling issues between and among partners while running the risk of losing the constituents upon which leadership is dependent. Neither teachers nor professors have ever been known for their political astuteness.

3. *Apples and Oranges--CBTE and CBE.* Competency Based Teacher Education calls for at least three different kinds of competencies: 1) Academic-Substantive, 2) Pedagogical-Substantive, and 3) Applied--in the act of teaching. Teaching involves a linking of all three and the field setting is seen as an opportunity to form the direct linkage. Assuming that the partners have established some agreed upon procedure for linking and assessing the competencies (and the various roles the partners are to play), it is fallacious to assume that the CBTE approach forms a "model" to be followed by schools seeking a competency program. While the CBTE focuses upon at least three competency "areas," the school usually focuses upon the first--substantive academic competencies. To expect the same model for both the university teacher preparation program and for a school curriculum is to deny the reality of the issues faced by the school. This can pose considerable problems in terms of mutual "competency" expectations and thus feed distrust and a questioning of intent.

4. *Two hats . . . the same size?* The Teaching Center partnership at Syracuse involves both partners in the screening and hiring of a field coordinator. The coordinator theoretically is the "manager" of the partnership. Located primarily at the Center setting and in on-going contact with preservice students as well as inservice programs, the coordinator is expected to look after the specific interests of both partners. The field coordinator is Syracuse

University's primary faculty member in the field while also being the guardian of the school's interests. Salary and fringe benefits are mutually shared by the university and the school district. In most cases, the field coordinator's role is expected to evolve. This sounds good. On paper. In reality the field coordinator's primary role emerges as that aimed at political survival--buying survival time allowing the real role to evolve. Unless the field coordinator's role is seen by both partners to be phased and unless both partner's build in *Center* support as opposed to partner support, the field coordinator is in a position to be "used" and/or "to use" in ways that may prove dysfunctional to the intended Center concept. At Syracuse we have identified over fifty "competencies" expected of the field coordinator. The fifty are clustered into three primary areas: political, administrative, and supervisory. For example, a political aspect of the job might be trying to find a convenient time for both preservice and inservice teachers might attend a seminar or workshop--a time that does not violate the Teacher's Organization's negotiated time constraints. An educational aspect may be observing a preservice student attempting to demonstrate competency in a given area.

A major related issue is the type of training, if any, a field coordinator receives. Granted, selection for the position includes assurance that the applicant has had extensive public school experience and extensive university experience but this in no way addresses the functioning requisites so essential. I am suggesting that the field coordinator wears a number of hats concurrently and unless the coordinator is assisted in determining priorities agreed to by both partners, the tasks become manageable only with randomness which can and does prove detrimental to the Center Program.

5. *The Changing Role of Professors:* In the traditional setting, a methods professor usually evolved his course, planned and prepared student experiences, and made all the decisions regarding student evaluation. Armed with a substantial history of academic freedom and/or at least accountability to his academic peers, a student did not take a course as much as take "Professor 'X'." The traditional setting found the professor in almost complete control of the ends and means of his particular offering.

The Teaching Center offers some distinct variance from the traditional setting. In the first place, the professor must now be involved not only with the substantive competencies or "ends" but in addition must face the application of his teaching in a field setting. In the second place, people other than himself and his academic peers have considerable voice in determining what he will teach, how he will teach, in what setting he will teach, and how his teaching will be evaluated. This particular issue has a number of rather vital sub-issues.

For example, who *does* determine the preservice curriculum? Is academic freedom lost to professional accountability and if not, what should be the relationship? When the traditional moorings have been uprooted, how does one determine faculty load? What kind of inservice does one provide for university faculty? Or, what new criteria are used in selecting faculty? And, what happens if a particularly astute faculty member involved in a Teaching Center wants to conduct field-oriented-action research--to whom does he go for permission and does this "permission" control the extent and type of research being conducted?

The above are not easy questions but unless they are addressed, we are back to Trilling's warning about submitting unwittingly to experience . . . a submission that may prove a disaster to the individual and to the Teaching Center Program.

6. *Two-Way Traffic on a One-Way Street:* Most of us who have been involved in developing Teacher Centers have either made or witnessed someone making the comment that school personnel should have direct input into determining the competencies a beginning teacher should have. This input suggests much more than simply sharing in the determination of competencies. If the so-called "exit requirements" mean anything, then we are saying to the school partner "you have a say in the form, function, and delivery of the preservice program." In all honesty, the partnership appears to bog down at this point. Suggestions from classroom teachers have been sparse other than reinforcing the general competencies already established. But, perhaps a reason for not joining in the planning, development, and assessment of teacher preparation programs is the vague realization that such joining would open the door to having university faculty become more directly involved in the planning, development, and assessment of public school curriculum--at least the curriculum being used in a particular Teaching Center.

   What happens, for example, if in a Teaching Center university faculty say that the existing school program should be modified and that the faculty does not feel that the learning experiences afforded the preservice students in that particular center are of value?

   The issue of program autonomy within a partnership is one that has been avoided in many cases. An effective Teaching Center makes the avoidance all but impossible.

7. *Partnership or cartel?* Most discussion of Teaching Centers imply that there are only two partners involved: the school system and the university. Occasionally one hears of the consortia concept which finds a number of school districts and universities sharing resources, expertise, and preservice/inservice opportunities. Seldom, however, does

one encounter the concept of having the community an equal partner in a Teaching Center. The Teacher Corps, although not considered by some as formalized Teaching Centers, does insist that the community be directly involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of preservice and inservice programs. At Syracuse, for example, Mr. Larry Briggs--the Community Coordinator--is involving parents of Teacher Corps pupils in being trained in teaching one of Bruce Joyce's models of teaching, has developed ways of training parents and teachers in observation techniques, and has asked for "inservicing" of parents on the assumption that education of the public is crucial if public education is going to change significantly. Briggs' approach has significance for how Teaching Centers may act to bring together, as colleagues rather than adversaries, the school, the university, and the community being served. It raises the question of whether or not existing personnel can adequately meet the needs of cooperating parent-educators. It raises, as well, the issue of direct community input into the policy and practices of Teaching Centers . . . an input that again raises the question of partners having isolated autonomy.

8. *Inservice . . . for Whom?* In what some might consider a "noblesse oblige" gesture, the concept of inservice programs has been posed for school personnel. At Syracuse, the school partner in a Teaching Center gets a specific number of vouchers which are "banked" and then used to secure university resources for school inservice. The number of vouchers is tied to the time Syracuse preservice students spend in the particular Teaching Center. The Center decides what inservice is to be offered but in reality the participating school system decides what it needs. The Teaching Center concept suggests that the Teacher Center Board (comprised of representatives of

both partners) makes the decision for the use of the vouchers. It is obvious that the Center may, on occasion, encounter the situation of using vouchers for inservice programs *not* formulated in autonomous fashion by the school district itself. This suggests the need for the schools and cooperating university (and perhaps the community) to collectively devise means of doing needs assessment and devise ways of evaluating existing programs and teaching.

In similar fashion, if one moves from the "noblesse oblige" gesture and asks about inservice programs to be conducted singularly for university faculty or for university faculty in conjunction with classroom teachers and parents, some basic questions erupt which have substantial policy implications for the university--policy questions regarding professorial autonomy, salary schedules, load, and staff evaluation.

9. *Research . . . or looking for what we missed before.* Earlier I briefly alluded to research--when discussing a possible reason for the demise of campus schools and when discussing who "controls" the research opportunities in a Teacher Center setting. It is obvious, I think, that a systematic research component should be built into the conceptual framework of any Teaching Center. The fact that such a component has not yet appeared is ominous. Research helps to sharpen focus, to identify variables, to ask the significant questions. It would appear that such help is needed. Pragmatically, unless the advocates of Teaching Centers can provide hard and relatively hard observable and measurable data that each partner is, in empirical fact, benefitting from the arrangement--that the costs, energy, changes make a difference in training teachers and in educating youngsters, the Teaching Center concept will be laid

> to rest along with the campus school. We need more than a hope and a hunch. . . .

The above nine issues are only a few of many . . . and all seem of vital importance in addressing the types and levels of changes that are in the offing. The issues are not new. Rather, the Teaching Center movement has been instrumental in exposing them. (I am sure that if a school person involved in Teaching Centers had identified the issues from the schools' point of view, different and vital other issues would be raised.) This I feel is a major step in effecting much needed changes in teacher preparation and in school offerings.

The underlying issue is one of whether or not we are willing to grapple with substantive issues or are content to continue grasping at shadows.